

Badawin Medicines

Chap. IX

757 *Girmiz*—A pink dye, used a good deal in towns for sore eyes among children and grown-ups.

Branding—Is universally used for aches, pains in the stomach and tuberculosis. The operation is usually done with red-hot tent pins (*khillal*).

Ramrdm—A wild flowering plant. Used for sore mouth, tender gums, mouth blisters in children and mouths sore from scurvy (contracted on the pearl banks in the Persian Gulf).

For grown-ups, the plant is boiled with water, and the resulting thin soup is used as a mouth-wash when cool. For children the *ramrdm* is crushed into a paste with pestle and mortar, mixed with *girmiz*, and applied to the sore place with the finger.

Al Ja'ada—A wild bush. Boiled in water gives a very useful purgative. The Badawin consider it also a cure for "Basra fever" (presumably malaria).

Fish soup—Is commonly drunk by women living near the sea to increase their milk. Sun-dried sprats are given to cows for the same reason throughout the Persian Gulf.

Shark's meat—Among the *hadhar* is said to cure impotency in man.

Cure for the Evil Eye—A man or woman upon whom the evil eye is supposed to have fallen is commonly treated as follows:

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A bowl of cold water is obtained, and in the water is placed a pair of scissors (*mugas*) bought from the town, a woman's comb (*mishr*), the head of a woodcutter's chopper (*tabbar*), a small needle (*ibra*), a large sailmaker's bodkin (*makhait*) and a round yellow pebble (*kharqa ma al nigat*).

The bowl is then placed on the patient's head and $\frac{1}{2}$ *waggiyah* (1½ lb. approximately) of molten lead is then poured into the cold water. The bowl is held on the head for a few seconds, and removed. The evil eye is said to go straight out of the patient into the bowl and the various articles it contains.

Among the Badawin every new-born child must have a piece of steel placed close to its side when it sleeps or lies in its cot. This nearly always consists of a naked dagger stuck upright in the ground close to its head, or laid alongside its body if in a cot.

Donkey's caul—The caul of a baby donkey is much valued for its medicinal virtues. It is taken and dried, and has properties such as the healing of wounds, or the bringing of boils to a head. A piece of the caul is cut off, soaked in water and salt and applied to the wound or boil, and kept in position by a bandage. Excellent results are reported.

Averting Evil Eye

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~~tribal~~ shaikhs, on the other hand, usually content themselves with one wife. In Kuwait, for instance, the ruler's Queen is a lady of the Al Subah. She is never divorced—such a thing would be a disgrace to the family as a whole. She remains the Shaikhah always. She magnanimously, however, allows the Shaikh Ibn Subah to take three other tribal wives, to amuse himself with, and to change them as often as he likes, provided he does not bring them into the town of Kuwait itself. They must remain in the desert. In this way her pride is satisfied. She remains the Queen. Here is an object lesson to the West.

At the birth of a child to a Badawin mother, a dagger, piece of steel, or even a needle or bodkin, must be placed in the cot or attached to the clothes of the baby. The mother cannot move the child without this piece of metal going with it. Iron or steel, is the thing that counts. Gold, etc., will not do. The idea is that it wards off the Evil Eye. The custom is universal among the Mutair, Dhafir, Shammar, 'Ajman and 'Awazim tribes, and probably will be found to exist among all the desert tribes.

A woman is said to be *hāmila* or *habla* when she is pregnant. She is said to have *walddat* or *thind'at* when the child is born. The term *thina* is always used for the unborn child.

CIRCUMCISION

Among the Badawin circumcision is performed when the boy is between three and a half and seven years.

The operation is usually done by one who has had previous practice. The day is looked upon as a family holiday, and according to a man's means, guests and neighbours are invited to a meal, best clothes are donned, and the womenfolk dance among themselves till a late hour, except the mother, who runs away (*tinhash*) and hides herself. The boy is now a "proper Muslim".

The season for the circumcision ceremony is nearly always June (*al Sifri*) when the *bāriḥ* or dry north-west wind is blowing. The wound is supposed to heal quickly then. If the sea is near by, the boy is encouraged to bathe, the salty nature of the water acting as an antiseptic.

Among some Badawin the feasting of guests and neighbours goes on for the number of days that the boy has years, i.e. if he is six years

Attitude to Sickness

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Drinking muddy water or infected water is another cause, especially among those who go off to the Haj. It is pitiful to see the numbers of men and women who return from the Pilgrimage with dysentery, colitis, and so forth.

Constipation, of course, is very common.

It must be clearly understood that only the fringe of this interesting subject has been touched upon, but enough, I hope, to show that the most crying of all needs in Arabia to-day, and especially among the Badawin, is good medical attention, hospitals in cities and travelling motor clinics, which can move about among the nomad population and treat them in their homes. The medical branch of the American mission (Dutch Reformed Church) for long established in the Persian Gulf, has done wonders, but much, much more is required.

One of the most interesting features of the Badawin's attitude towards sickness, and especially wounds and sores, is his firm belief that certain pleasant smells or scents have a directly harmful effect on the progress towards recovery. It is in consequence a common sight to see Badawins entering the town of Kuwait, etc., with their nostrils stuffed up with dirty pieces of rag, inserted in the form of "plugs". A sufferer religiously keeps these in his nose until such time as he can escape out of the town again. The "smell of a woman", as he calls it, is a particularly dangerous form of scent to a wound, etc.

If a man is recovering from smallpox, on the other hand, it is believed that certain human smells, and certain foods, have a highly beneficial effect on the convalescent. He does not, however, know what this food is, or what particular person's odour will help him, so he goes out to receive visits of all the women in the neighbourhood, and is given every possible change of diet, in the fond hope that he will accidentally light on the right thing to effect a cure. This treatment was tried for Nazzal al Rashidi's illness in 1932.

In my various wanderings among the Badawin, I have always carried a few common medicines, notably of a purgative kind. These have always proved useful. Aspirin too I have found invaluable, as strange though it may seem sun-headaches appear to be fairly common among tribal folk, especially among the women.

Simple Fractures are dealt with fairly satisfactorily by the Badawin. He understands the use of splints, and usually before putting the